



Decision-Making Strategies:

Methods for Team-based Competitions

The following resource is an excerpt from “**Total Quality Learning® (TQL®): A Team Development Workbook for Thinking Skills Sports.**”

The techniques presented in this resource will enable a team of high school students to perform effectively in team competitions such as **TEAMS**.

Important Concepts:

Do not confuse decision-making with problem-solving.

Decision-making strategies are used in the problem-solving process but are not the same as the logical stepwise progression necessary for effective problem-solving.

Decision-making strategies involve the interpersonal skills used for a group to reach a decision. Some decision-making strategies involve only one or a few persons, while others involve the entire team through discussion.

The problem-solving process is an impersonal, step-wise, methodical procedure by which the team will think through a problem, its sub-problems, methods of approach and possible solutions.

There are typically four decision-making strategies under which most decisions are normally made: 1) Authoritarian, 2) Sub-group, 3) Majority, and 4) Consensus.

Authoritarian

The team leader makes whatever decisions have to be made and those decisions are assumed to be final. An example of this would be a judge handing down a decision in a legal case.

In some instances, team members may give this authority to the team leader when certain conditions apply (i.e., there are few options from which to choose, or the team cannot agree and the timeline is short).

Sub-group

A small part of the team gains sufficient influence to force the team leader or entire group to adopt a decision. An example of this in politics is when a vocal minority insists on certain rights and the majority goes along with those decisions.

This method can be effective if the sub-group approaches the task to assist the full team, and if the team requested the sub-group to work in this manner.

Note: The authoritarian and sub-group strategies could be used in preparation or implementation of the TEAMS competition in instances when one, or a few team members, demonstrate strength in select academic areas.

Majority

In this method, a vote is taken and the majority decides the issue (the level of majority should be previously agreed upon).

A specific weakness of the majority method is that some percentage of the group, sometimes as much as almost half, may disagree with the outcome. This means that almost half the group may be unhappy with the decision.

Note: This strategy is less likely to be used for TEAMS due to the small number of team members.

Consensus

This method is considered the most effective, but it is also the most difficult strategy because every member of the group must agree to the decision before it can be adopted.

In a consensus decision, the level of agreement reached is often related not so much to the fact that everyone absolutely agrees, but that each member has decided he/she can live with the decision. If any team member cannot live with the decision, then there is no consensus decision.

All team members must determine individually whether or not they can live with a particular decision. To determine this, it is helpful to think of the decision in terms of the diagram below.

	Can Live With It	Can't Live With It
Agree	I agree	Shouldn't occur in consensus method.
Disagree	I agree, but with reservations.	I can't agree. Let's discuss more.

As you are making a decision, the box in which you place yourself will determine the following:

- 1) You can't agree and must ask the group to continue discussion;
- 2) You agree with the decision and may proceed; or
- 3) You agree with the decision, but you need to determine your comfort level with the decision to which you are agreeing.

Using the consensus strategy can involve a great deal of time because of the effort expended for reasoning, debate or consensus building; however, the decision reached is usually the best possible decision and all team members will work together to support it.

Note: The consensus strategy may also be used to determine if, when and how the team might use any of the other methods.

ACTIVITY 1

After reviewing the four decision-making strategies, students should use this worksheet to list examples of each of each strategy they observed in their team or group situation(s).

Strategy

Examples

Authoritarian

Sub-group

Majority

Consensus

Discussion

It may be difficult for students to identify consensus strategy examples, particularly from school group situations; however, they are likely to identify authoritarian or sub-group examples. As the team becomes more skilled in decision-making strategies, more examples of consensus decision-making will emerge.



ACTIVITY 2

SURVIVAL ON THE MOON

This exercise was originally designed by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to train astronauts prior to the first Moon landing. It will provide practice in consensus decision-making.

The situation:

You are a member of one of two space details assigned to the mission ship "Galaxy," which was originally scheduled to rendezvous with the mother ship "Angel" on the lighted surface of the Moon. Due to mechanical difficulties, however, the Galaxy was forced to land on the dark side of the Moon, some 200 miles from the rendezvous point. During piloting and landing, some of the crew and the captain died. Much of the equipment aboard was damaged. No one knows for sure how long the ship's life support systems will last because all gauges broke in the landing. Survival is critical.

Listed on the worksheet that follows are the 15 items left intact and undamaged after landing.

Your task, first individually and then as a team, is to rank order the 15 items in terms of their importance to the survival of the remaining crew of the mission ship, Galaxy.

Procedure:

- First, each team member should rank each item individually.
- Second, the full team should discuss and debate each team member's reasoning for his or her ranking.
- Third, the group should agree on a final ranking through consensus.

The official NASA ranking and a brief statement of reasoning for each decision are presented after the worksheet. These rankings were developed by a panel of experts and should be considered the "textbook" answers for this exercise. Based on more recent knowledge gained about the Moon, there can be viable arguments for changing some of the rankings of the less obvious items.

In nearly all instances, the group's agreed upon ranking is considerably closer to the NASA ranking than are most individual's rankings.



ACTIVITY 2 - WORKSHEET

Rank Ordering Of Undamaged Survival Items

<u>My ranking</u>	<u>Group's ranking</u>	<u>Item</u>
_____	_____	One box of matches
_____	_____	100 cartons of food concentrate (20-day ration for each crew member)
_____	_____	150 feet of nylon rope
_____	_____	Parachute silk (from three parachutes)
_____	_____	One portable heating unit
_____	_____	Two .45-calibre loaded pistols
_____	_____	One case dehydrated milk
_____	_____	Three 100 pound tanks of oxygen (Each tank holds a 20-day supply for each crew member)
_____	_____	One stellar map (of the moon's constellation)
_____	_____	One life raft
_____	_____	One magnetic compass
_____	_____	Five gallons of water (Normally a 10-day ration for each member of the crew)
_____	_____	Five light flares
_____	_____	First-aid kit containing injection needles
_____	_____	Battery-powered FM receiver-transmitter



ACTIVITY 2 – ANSWERS

Rank	Item	Reason
14	One box of matches	No air
08	100 cartons of food concentrate (20-day ration for each crew member)	Nourishment
06	150 feet of nylon rope	Traverse ravines, carry supplies
09	Parachute silk (from three parachutes)	Easily spotted, carry supplies
13	One portable heating unit	Suits are self- contained
07	Two .45-calibre loaded pistols	Emergency propulsion
12	One case dehydrated milk	Can't mix it
01	Three 100-pound tanks of oxygen (each tank holds 20-day supply for each crew member)	Must breathe
03	One stellar map (of the Moon's constellation)	Navigation
10	One life raft	Carry items
15	One magnetic compass	Stellar map better
02	Five gallons of water (normally a 10-day ration for each member of the crew)	Must drink
04	Five light flares	Others to find you
11	First-aid kit containing injection needles	Can't open suit
05	Battery-powered FM receiver- transmitter	Others to find you